



**Statement of United Nations Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator
Robert Watkins during Press Conference in Akkar**

Halba, north Lebanon

Tuesday, 20 November 2012

Good Afternoon,

I am very pleased to be back in Akkar and thank the Municipality of Halba and the Head of the Municipality, Dr. Saed el Halabi, for receiving us today.

This morning I visited the area of Wadi Khaled to examine the impact of the Syria crisis on different Lebanese communities living there. I also visited a center for the High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Qobayat where I was updated on the assistance extended to the thousands of Syrians displaced to Lebanon because of the violence in their country. There are now over 125,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon who are receiving assistance, but there are also thousands of Lebanese who have, in one way or another, been affected by the crisis who are also in need.

Let me say how impressed I have been by the generosity and hospitality that the Lebanese communities in Akkar continue to extend to the Syrian refugees, twenty months after the breakout of the crisis. Despite the many challenges they themselves face, Lebanese families are still hosting and supporting around thirty percent of the Syrian refugee population.

In an attempt to alleviate some of those additional burdens, the Lebanese authorities, in coordination with the United Nations and other local and international NGOs, are assisting those Lebanese families to meet their immediate needs, but also with a longer-term objective of promoting development in the area.

In that regard, in addition to the quick impact projects undertaken by UNHCR, more than a quarter of a million dollars has been earmarked by UNDP for at least 16 development projects identified in collaboration with local communities and authorities. These projects aim at addressing the priority needs for the Akkar, including the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector and infrastructure, boosting the educational sector, and promoting a culture of peaceful



coexistence, particularly in schools or areas where there are both Lebanese and Syrians living together.

Another group of Lebanese affected by the conflict are those who have been displaced from their places of residence in Syria. I visited some of those families in Wadi Khaled this morning and listened to their concerns. The International Organization for Migration and the World Food Programme, in coordination with the Lebanese authorities, are trying to address some of their needs.

There are also Lebanese families who have been forced to leave their homes in the border areas inside Lebanon because of cross-border shelling and other security-related incidents along the border. Their lives have been disrupted, especially farmers who can no longer tend their fields.

Yesterday I was in Tripoli where I met with different political, security and economic representatives including the chief of the Chamber of Commerce and Trade and the Safadi foundation. It was an opportunity to discuss the humanitarian impact of the Syria crisis on the city and on those who have taken refuge there as well as to exchange ideas on what more could be done by the UN.

I welcome the commitment and efforts of the Lebanese authorities and communities in the Akkar to address the ever increasing needs of both refugees and local populations. It is clear, however, that as we are at the beginning of the winter season, and there is every likelihood that even more refugees will be arriving over the coming months, it is crucial that we act together quickly to ensure the health and safety of both refugee and local Lebanese populations.
